



Volume I, Spring 2009

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WOMEN In Fatherhood

Welcome to the Inaugural Newsletter of Women In Fatherhood, Inc.



WIFI Board of Directors: from left to right: Ruby Freeman, Stacey Bouchet, Julia Hamilton-Hayman, Jacquie Boggess, Lisa Nkonoki, Lisa Nitsch, Petrice Sams-Abiodu, Barbara Lacina, Jeanette Davis-Loeb, Frances Ballard, Nisa Muhammed. Not pictured: Linda Aitch

Women In Fatherhood, Inc. (WIFI) is an organized voice of women with diverse perspectives and experiences. We are a national 501c3 comprised of women with direct or indirect professional involvement in the responsible fatherhood field. The mission of Women In Fatherhood is to contribute to and advocate for family and community

well-being through the support of positive father involvement and healthy family relationships.

Our Guiding Principles

1. Advancing the responsible fatherhood field will provide fathers with the same opportunities in their parental roles that have been afforded to mothers.
2. Community well being is dependent on healthy family relationships.
3. Exposing fathers and mothers to healthy relationship and marriage education and providing couples who choose to marry with relationship education and support can benefit their families and communities.
4. Parents should work cooperatively in raising their children regardless of their romantic relationship.
5. Each parent provides a unique and complementary contribution to the development of their children.
6. The safety and well-being of children and their parents should not be compromised by efforts to promote father involvement and/or healthy family relationships.
7. Healthy family relationships are absent of violence, financial neglect and child abuse.

Why WIFI?

In December 2005, the Annie E. Casey Foundation convened a meeting of men and women working in responsible fatherhood to assess the influence women were having in the responsible fatherhood field. After extensive consultations with

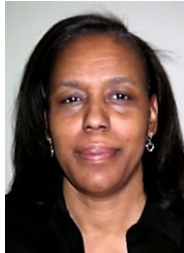
experts in the field, the group found a high level of need for a collective effort of women to advocate and support responsible fatherhood in program and policy. This led to the formation of Women In Fatherhood—A diverse group of

women dedicated to advancing the responsible fatherhood field through public awareness, policy advocacy, education, and collaboration. ***Women recognizing the impact of positive fathering on children.***



This poster can be ordered from www.nlffi.org/publications.asp

Message from the President



Jacquelyn Boggess, J.D. is the Associate Director of the Center for Family Policy and Practice.

*W*elcome to the first issue of the newsletter of Women In Fatherhood, Inc. WIFI was founded in 2006 as a not-for-profit corporation with the initial support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. All of the Board members are women with various expertise in the fatherhood field. WIFI seeks to improve the well-being of vulnerable families with children and the communities in which they live by supporting positive father involvement in their lives.

As we send out this first newsletter, there is great national interest in father in-

volvement and fatherhood programming. This is a very exciting time for us, and we look forward to communicating with you and sharing information with you regularly through this newsletter. We know that there are many other women, groups, and organizations working with fathers and their families, and we look forward to meeting and learning from everyone.

This work is important, but not uncomplicated. We understand that for our society, it is less problematic to foster and support motherhood and the connection between mothers and children. The perceived simplicity of supporting mothers as parents is based in a number of factors that are both biological and social. In fact, fatherhood is less complex when marriage defines and encompasses men's parenthood. However, because the last

50 years in this country have seen increased rates of divorce, and non-marital childbirth without an equal, responsive change in law or social customs, our society has more difficulty defining and supporting fatherhood.

We recognize the many current national, state, and local efforts around the issue of fatherhood. These efforts encourage us to move forward with our work, for we are convinced that a distinct and declarative voice of, and from, women is essential to the success of these efforts and the current national dialogue. Women are, of course, not fathers, but we do make up the balance of communities, and we are essential partners in raising children in safe and healthy families. To that end, Women In Fatherhood is intended to facilitate this partnership and the critical role it plays in supporting fatherhood. ~Jacqui

WIFI's Officers 2009—2011



From left to right: Stacey Bouchet, Secretary; Jeanette Davis-Loeb, Treasurer; Ruby Freeman, Member at Large; Lisa Nitch, Vice President; and Jacquelyn Boggess, President



Petrice Sams-Abiodun & Barbara Lacina at WIFI's Board Development Retreat, March 2009.

In the Words of Women: A Summary of WIFI Research

In 2008, Women In Fatherhood, Inc. conducted a series of focus group sessions and interviews with women from various parts of the country. We gathered surveys from women regarding their true thoughts and feelings about the value of fathers in the lives of their children. Our goal was to begin to bring together diverse voices of women into the national conversation around the true value of fatherhood. The questions we posed to these women included: 1) what are women's views of fathers and father involvement in the lives of their children, 2) what are women's perceptions of barriers to father involvement, and 3) for women who believe that father involvement in children's lives is important, in what ways do women think such involvement can be supported?

Research studies have shown that women, in their roles as both mothers and professionals, can act as "gatekeepers" or regulators of father involvement, and are often not supportive of fathers' efforts. Given this, it is essential that WIFI explore

and share women's perspectives on fathers and fatherhood in order to contribute to future practice, programs, and policies. To that end, the organization held a series of focus groups and in-depth surveys with approximately 200 women across the country. The following five major themes emerged:

1. **Fathers' physical and emotional support for their children matter as much to the well-being of children as much as their financial support:** The respondents indicated that it was important for a father to be involved with his children and provided examples of the consequences for children if a father is not involved, including future psychological and relationship issues, and susceptibility to high risk behaviors such as sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, gang membership, and dropping out of school. The most frequent consequence women identified was a child's feeling of loss, abandonment, or "a void" due to the father's absence.

In the Words of Women: Continued...

More than 25 percent of the women interviewed were low-income mothers who expressed negative experiences with the men in their lives, but they all emphasized the desire for their children's fathers to be emotionally and physically available to their children. While these women indicated that *they* do not need men in their lives, all agreed that fathers were important to their children and they wanted the fathers to be involved.

2. **Fathers face multiple, significant barriers to engaging responsibly with their children.** Women stated that mothers are often barriers to father involvement, particularly if conflict is present in the parents' relationship, or the mother wants to be "vengeful." Respondents also indicated that the "ideals" around motherhood in society hinder father involvement and identified a range of barriers fathers face in developing relationships with their children, including: low self esteem, unemployment or underemployment, mental-health issues, substance abuse, incarceration, legal issues, and child support.
3. **Fathers should receive assistance that will help them better their lives and their involvement in their children's lives.** The resources and services participants indicated were needed in order to improve the prospect of effective father involvement include re-forming public policy, restoring men's perspectives of themselves, getting more men involved in program work related to fatherhood, and offering relationship/communication/parenting skills to both men and women.
4. **WIFI should focus on four elements related to father involvement: Public Awareness, Public Will, Public Policies, and Programs.** Women believe that focusing on these four "P's" will make the public more aware of the importance of fathers in the lives of their children, and help to direct public and private resources to them. For example, educating mothers about the importance of father involvement and helping to create or change laws, policies, services, and programs that impact fathers were noted as particularly important endeavors for WIFI to undertake.
5. **Responsible Fatherhood extends beyond biological children; responsible fathers are a source of "strength" and are "role models" to others in the community.**

"The ideal father brings strength to his community...by aiding his children to become contributing members of society."

Conclusions: This project provided a rich source of information about women's perspectives on fathers and father involvement. The women maintained that fathers matter a great deal in the lives of children, families and communities. Further, participants understood the multiple barriers that impact father involvement, particularly the barriers that affect

fathers who do not live with their children. These men frequently must navigate a strained relationship with the mother in order to spend time with his child. Despite the pervasive belief that many women hold negative opinions of the fathers of their children and the value of the father's role in the family, the women we surveyed overwhelmingly expressed the need for fathers to be involved emotionally and physically in their children's lives. Their insights into the barriers fathers face, and suggestions for supporting positive father involvement, reinforce the premise of WIFI's work—demonstrating that diverse women can share in the collective mission of supporting father involvement. This support is, however, complex, underscoring the need for an organization like WIFI to echo the essential voices of women when shaping research, policy, and practice that affect fathers and their children.

"There is a false assumption that fathers are good for money only."



WIFI Board Member Petrice Sams-Abiodun works with Joe Jones of the National Fatherhood Leaders Group



WIFI Officer Jeanette Davis-Loeb meets with Maurice Moore of the Annie E. Casey Foundation about WIFI's "Challenge Grant."

Up-coming Events

- 6/16-6/18** African American Healthy Marriage Initiative
Connecting Research to Practice Conference
"The Black Family is the 21st Century
Chapel Hill
- 6/17-6/19** Eleventh Annual International Fatherhood Conference.
Baltimore, MD
- 6/18** Responsible Fatherhood - Free Webcast
Speaker: Kenneth Braswell, NY Fatherhood Initiative
To Register visit <http://www.albany.edu/sph/coned/phl/fatherhood.htm>
- 6/20** National Responsible Fatherhood Rally
Lincoln Memorial, D.C.
12 p.m.
- 6/21** Father's Day
- 6/22** Fatherhood Forum (NYC)
"Can Government Programs Meet the Challenge of
Low-Income Fathers?"
Abyssinian Baptist Church
- 7/8-7/11** Smart Marriages Conference
Orlando, FL



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You Can Help Fathers & Families By Donating to WIFI!

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It's Tax Deductable!

Recent Events

On May 5, 2009, WIFI collaborated with the State of Louisiana, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the National Fatherhood Leaders Group, the New Orleans Fatherhood Consortium & Life Changers Resource Center, Dedicated Dads of Family Road of Greater Baton Rouge, and Fill the Gap Program – Albany, LA to host the

Louisiana's Fatherhood and Family Policy Breakfast.

All of these agencies and organizations sponsored the breakfast as part of their work to address the issues and problems related to fathers and families in Louisiana. The goal of the breakfast was to influence changes in Louisiana policies that strengthen responsible fatherhood and positive family involvement, which will ultimately have a positive effect on economic and community development in Louisiana.

Essential voices. Collective mission.